1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

159
[595] be two wives in my house and they will always fight and quarrel, which I don't like at all. And I can only support one wife.

I have a second wife, but only one. She helps me in my daily [434] work and comes out with me into the fields and helps me dig and till the ground and together we earn about eight annas a day. At other times we work on the farm which we rent. We have about one acre and must give one-third of the produce to the *malguzar*. If the crops [241] are good we get some benefit, but if they are not it is not worth the labour. I sow my fields in pulse, wheat and *kodo*. (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*). Often we get enough to eat for the whole year from our field. For about four to six months we eat *kodo* and then for three to four months we eat wheat and in this way provide for our food. [464] This year (1937) our crops failed badly and we did not get much out of our field so we have to work as day labourers wherever we could get work. Farming brings us less return than daily coolie work, even [427 though the latter is irregular. I have also taken a contract for a piece 314] of ground where lac trees grow and pay rupees five a year for the privilege of collecting the lac. The contract is for twenty years and is made with the owner of the forest in Silgnor village. I also graze my cattle there, and after deducting my animal tax I get a profit of Rs. ten or twelve per year. I don't like to work as a coolie as we are often mistreated when under the authority of one man. I prefer to take or make a contract with people who are good farmers and thus go and work in their fields according to my own free choice and desire. Thus I am saved from all kinds of mistreatments which are meted out by owners or supervisors, and this, which is true of me, is true of all members of our Kol community. We would prefer to die of hunger than to have our liberty taken away and be treated as slaves.

Once when I was very young a great crisis befell our family. [731] It was at the time when almost the whole of India suffered from a great famine (1899-1900). As my father was dead the support of the family fell upon the shoulders of my mother. Every morning and evening she used to cut grass wherever she could gather it and sell it to the people who could pay. She used to bring roots from the jungles and prepare a sort of bread for us out of them. She even brought the leaves of certain kinds of trees and made them do as vegetables in our rude food. Oh, it was a very hard time for us, but a mother's love and care saved us from that great famine. She used to work all day long; and though she seemed to be very old she worked like a young woman. Finally, after it was over she fell sick and died. She blessed us before she died. Her blessings are still with me and since then I have not suffered the want of anything. Now I have a *pakka* house.

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

159 I have tried to be an honest man and the police and government [648 forest officers trust me and have just offered me the post of *Sarkari* [622 *Muhaddam* (government headman) of my village. This is a very high 554] honour for me for which my friends will respect me very much.

BAJRANJI: A KOL AND A FAMINE[1]

I was born in Rewa, my *desh*, but I have no idea of the date of my birth nor of the names of my father or mother. When my parents left Rewa and came to Barela I was just an infant and didn't know much about what was going on. After three or four years my father died in Lunsar village while my mother died in Barela when I was thirty years old.

When my father died I did not get much property, but whatever I got was used up in feeding the people of the community at the time of his death, and later on more was spent on the ceremonial feast following my mother's death. At that time I had a few head of cattle, but soon after four of them were killed and eaten by tigers.

I have been married twice, and by my first wife had two children. The first child was a girl who is now married and who has children of her own. She is about twenty-one years old now. The second child was a boy who is now about twelve years of age. But when these children were about twelve and eight respectively their mother became [587] very ill and died. Whatever money I had, all was spent on her for her recovery, but it was of no use. Then I married another wife and this cost me to a great extent the remaining money that I had. [434] Between the two I spent all the money which I possessed, which was about Rs. 300/- in cash and I found myself moneyless.

When I was a boy I was very eager to learn, but it was very difficult for a Kol to think of studying with the Brahmins. The village school seemed reserved for them. So my parents could not send me and they didn't care much about my education, and though I couldn't [212] study I made friends with an educated boy and he helped me and I finished the first Hindi book, but that too I have forgotten and cannot now read nor write.

When my mother died there were three of us: my sister, my [164] brother and myself. Both my brother and sister have since died of plague here in Barela, but I was saved by God's grace. About eight years ago my brother died leaving his wife and children. I do not [595] keep her with me in our home for I know that it would be hard on me and my wife and that if I keep her it would really mean that there will

1 See plate XXVI.

l:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

[P. 260]

CHAPTER XIII

THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE KOLS

433 The economic condition of the cultivators of the Central Provinces
434 is not a very prosperous one. The following table is reproduced from the Census Report for 1931 and is for the average cultivator. It will be seen from the following pages that the Kols fall far below this meagre income.

Item	Normal	When crop is 25% below normal
Size of holding ..	Acres 21	
Value of gross crop outturn after deducting marketing expenses	Rupees 491	Rupees 369
Income from subsidiary sources	50	50
Total income ..	541	419
Cost of maintenances and clothing ..	214	214
Cultivating expenses ..	157	157
Rent ..	21	21
Total necessary expenses ..	392	392
Balance ..	149	27[1]

434 It is further noted that from this balance the worker must provide sums for funerals and marriages, repairs to buildings, journey costs, repayment on debt (the normal debt of the cultivator is said to be Rs. 227), interest charges, the cost of education for his children and the little luxuries such as *pan* and tobacco. These figures are worked out for a family which has an average of three surviving children. Not much can be done in normal years, to say nothing of bad years when actual deficits are expected and more money is borrowed.

464 As will be observed in the following pages, Kols are mostly day
434 labourers and under village conditions the income of day labourers is very small. Usually no money is given; they are paid in kind. In villages near Katni it was found that the field labourer was paid three

1 *Census of India*, 1931, XII : 1, p. 60.

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pounds of wheat for a day's work in the field. If a cash arrangement is entered into, the rate is 1½ annas for the same period of labour. In urban areas the situation is better. In 1911 the average wage was four annas a day. In 1921 it was six annas and ten years later it had increased to nine annas. It was our belief that seven years later wages had considerably fallen. Kol labourers in Jubbulpore industrial plants seldom received more than 5½ annas per day while for the same work in Katni and Maihar they received but four annas. As a rule women workers received about half the above.

It should be kept in mind that we have with the Kols the phenomenon of a primitive and backward people coming into the stream of rural and urban life. Many changes have occurred and many more will take place in the future.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. Kol people live together in groups, either in a section of the village or in a village of their own. Taking the village as a whole it would appear that they are economically well below the average. In certain places, however, they seem to be making a distinct advance as they continue to dwell there and develop a place for themselves in the life of the community. A resident of Barela, not himself a Kol, said that he had been watching them for many years. He said that twenty-five to thirty years ago they were very backward compared to their present condition. At that time they lived in grass huts, wore only loin cloths and in every respect were jungly, backward and inferior; but now the majority of Kols in Barela have houses with tiled roofs and thick mud walls, although the earlier type of dwelling is still occasionally found. This is indicated in Plate V. They now put on better clothing and in general their economic standard seems to be rising. In another place we found Kols putting tiles on their roofs which normally cost Rs. 20 per 1,000. These were being laid on top of the grass thatch. Country tile is more generally used and it costs from ten to twelve rupees to cover the house in this manner. Whenever the Kols are in contact with a somewhat higher culture and have a sense of security as regards lands and tenancy, they tend to make their houses much better than otherwise. Whenever we have asked groups why they have built and are living in such crude houses, they have told us that they do not know from one day to the next whether they will be staying there; and if they have to move on tomorrow they can easily pull up and leave. It is also said that this was the way their forefathers dwelt, and why should they do otherwise. Their employment is very uncertain and hence their houses are crude.

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

prepare tiles in a workshop near Deori; a Barela Kol has taken up the work of a mason and bricklayer. In another family we found that members had been jungle postal-runners for three generations. In Sihora they said that their chief occupation was digging in the fields, though they also cut wood and sold grass; only one or two rented lands. At Katni we found that they were chiefly employed in the cement works, but would soon be going elsewhere, as the cement factories were in the process of closing down. In some of the villages about Katni they were found to be mostly labourers in the surrounding fields. At Kymore thousands are employed in the great cement factories; at Maihar they are mostly engaged in lime-kiln work. Near Rewa City they seem to be mostly serfs and labourers. Further north they grind sandstone for the glass works, and at Chunar in the United Provinces help to dig the rock out of the hillsides. We found a few literate Kols in Katni who had learned to read in the Church Mission School. One of these was a clerk in a warehouse at busy times of the year; the rest of the year he would do whatever he could find which often was nothing but coolie work.

THE SITUATION IN THE VILLAGES: *Land and Income*. In our visits to numerous villages we made enquiries as to the economic situation on the part of the Kols living there. A careful survey was made near Jubbulpore. Text figure 30 shows the area. Only a few Kols in the large group at Barela actually rent lands for farming purposes; either on shares or on straight rent. In Kharara Ghat the situation seems to be the opposite, for nearly every household there holds land from the *malguzar*. Money is earned on the side from the sale of wood, grass and *tendu* leaves for *biris*. In Barela a survey of thirty-nine families indicated that only three held lands, and that the total acreage so held was but 5¼ acres. Thirty families in Kharara Ghat hold 82 acres of land; in some cases taxes for the same are paid direct to the Government, while to the *malguzar* they say they pay Rs. 10 per *khandi* of wheat sown, this being considered as 1/3 the produce of the land.

Barela Kols do most of the coolie work on the roads near that place and also labour on the farms as occasion offers. All the able members of the family work and we found that on the average the family income was Rs. ten to twelve per month for this type of labour. One dealer in charcoal said that he cleared locally in Barela about Rs. 120 per year. Another Barela Kol has the custom of purchasing wood from the Gonds who bring it down from the hills near-by. This is bought for five pice, is then cut up into shorter lengths by himself

34 [text continues on middle of p. 266]

li Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

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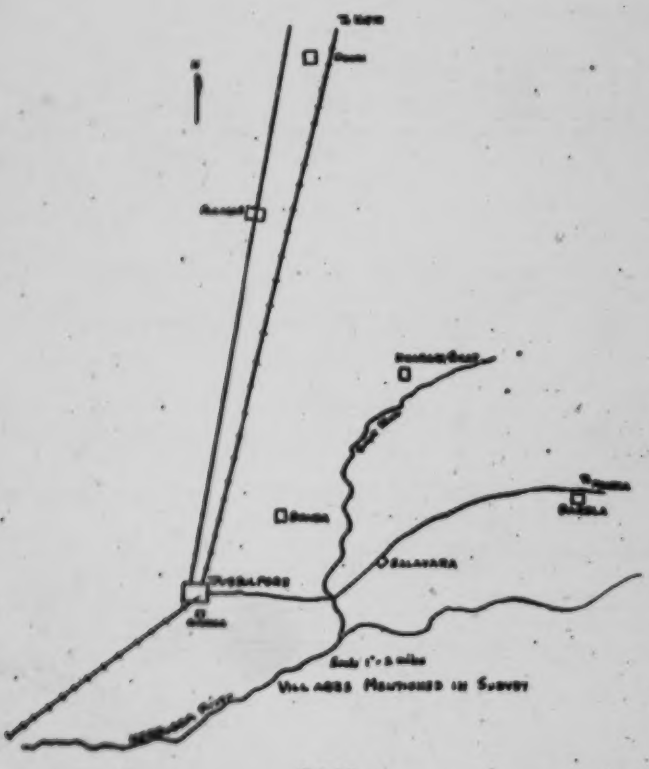

Fig. 30.

464 and family and is resold for ten pice, just double the amount he paid
434 for it. Another Kol, acquainted with brick-laying and general re-
[439] pairing, earns twelve annas per day when work is available. A few
in Barela deal in *tendu* leaves and sell the same to contractors from
[556] Jubbulpore. There was only one Kol in Barela whom the other Kols
considered wealthy. "Wealthy" was defined as the possession of
[427] ornaments, animals, and some money. The rent for land about Barela
varies considerably as it is not all of equal value. Two Kols, however,
were paying at the rate of Rs. 4-10-0 per acre.

333 At Deori we found that the Kol colony was mostly employed in
464 the tile [factory where they are paid by piece work and receive
434

1;Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

Rs. 4-8-0 per 1,000 tiles molded and put on the rack to harden. They told us that the average Kol worker would mold about 1,000 tiles per week.

In Panagar there are about 100 families of Kols. Some of them keep chickens and sell the few eggs they get in the local bazaar, or even take them to Jubbulpore on market days. Three or four own bullock carts. The rest of the community divide their time between working on the roads and doing coolie work in the fields when such work is available. This brings them from two to three annas per day. This work is far from steady, being largely seasonal.

In Benda village there are fifteen houses of Kols. Their main work is breaking stone for the metalled roads and preparing limestone for the kilns. They believe that by steady work they can make up to Rs. three per week, but the work is very hard and the hours are long. A few collect *tendu* leaves in season and when other work is slack they go out to the jungles and cut wood. They can earn from three to three and a half annas per day in that way. None of the Benda Kols does any farming.

At Salavara village on the Gaur River, we found that all were engaged in breaking stones for road metal. Their report seemed to indicate that they had to work harder for what they got than some other groups. They said it took them fifteen days to break a *saikara*—a stone measuring approximately 1,000 cubic feet—that two men were required and that they received Rs. 2-8-0 for the *saikara*. Five years ago, they said, they got Rs. 4/- for the same measure. They claim that the work is also harder now as they have to go further for suitable rock.

At Garha close to Jubbulpore, there is a fair-sized Kol community. The village is quite distinct from any other place and about 100 Kol families dwell there. Their occupations are various, and but few have steady work. This group consists mostly of coolies who get work wherever it is available or where the best wages are offered. Sawing wood is a common opening as they do not live far from the timber yards where all the sawing of planks is done by hand. During the wheat harvest they are nearly all away in the fields, leaving their houses empty for the few weeks of the harvesting season.

On a preliminary visit to Rewa State we went to a small Kol community not far from Rewa City. These Kols have considerable land for which they pay rental to a Mahratta landlord. What this group told us has been confirmed by many others, both in and out of Rewa State and seems to characterize the conditions of the Kols there. One informant told us that he was married about twelve years pre-

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

566 426 [124] viously, at which time he incurred a debt of Rs. fourteen for the expenses of the wedding. This was borrowed from a *Thakur* of a near-by village who appeared most glad to lend it to him. Ever since that day this *Thakur* has considered him as his serf, and he is supposed to go daily to him; and even though he has worked for the *Thakur* for the past twelve years he has not cleared the debt and does not believe that he ever will. He is virtually a slave of this man, is on call at any time, and must give him the first work until he no longer requires him. For each day's work the *Thakur* will give him 1½ *seers* of *chana* (usually *Dolichos lablab*) or perhaps the same amount of barley still in the head. Money was never given, nor rice or wheat. This group of Kols in Rewa was a very intelligent one on the whole, but indicated that Rewa State was not a place where one could get more than just [538] the necessary food. As one expressed it: "In Rewa there is no stomach hunger, only money hunger." This appeared to be quite a common expression over a wide area. Food was available there, but no money for the other necessities of life nor for weddings, burials and the like.

339 464 434 In centres like Kymore and Katni where there are large cement works, the majority of the coolies employed in the many types of manual labour are Kols. The work is very hard and the wages are low: usually not more than four annas a day for males and three annas for female workers.

434 [423] [162] 222 276 434 438 Kharara Ghat, the isolated Kol village, is perhaps as independent economically as any Kol group studied by us. It was previously noted that this village controls about eighty acres of land. They say that ordinarily they do not sell the farm products, rather keeping them for the use of the village as well as holding a small reserve for emergencies. The village contains about 135 adult persons and the land farmed takes care of their food. Money for other needs is gained in many ways: during the months of May and June the leaves of the *tendu* tree (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) are picked for use in the *biri* manufacture. The leaves are gathered in the early morning or the evenings, and in the heat of the day the people sit under the trees or on the verandas of their houses and arrange the leaves in bundles of one hundred each, tying them with fibre. These bundles are then sold to contractors at the rate of four annas per hundred bundles. Prices vary somewhat according to the quality and the demand. The Kharara Ghat folk claim that they earn from Rs. 400 to 500 per year from the sale of these leaves.

434 313 Kharara Ghat has other sources of income. The village is situated on a jungly section on the edge of the reserved forest. Wood is

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

cut in this forest and carried to Jubbulpore where it is sold to customers among the military folks living on the Ridge. In this way three to four annas per trip are earned. The Kol who takes wood from the reserved forest must pay two pice for each load carried on his head out of the forest.

The cutting of grass during the rainy season is another source of income for this village and a good load of grass, such as may be carried on the head, will bring from three to four annas in Jubbulpore. Gardening would be possible along the banks of the river but they do not do any there. What gardening they do is limited to the manure pile where pumpkins and the like are allowed to grow. There is an occasional hunt with dogs and torches, mainly for hares which stand and watch the light and are either clubbed to death or caught by the dogs. There were no guns in the village, nor did they use the bow and arrow. Although they live right beside the river fishing is not common. Sometimes fish are cornered in shallow water and caught with strips of cloth.

In our visits to Kol villages we also went to numerous bazaars. The bazaar is usually a weekly feature and there is a definite rotation from village to village. In all our inspections we did not find anything for sale in the weekly bazaars which had been brought there by Kols. Any wood, grass, eggs or the like, which they do sell are sold privately to individuals.

Animals. Whenever possible Kols keep animals such as cows, bullocks, goats and chickens, but unless they are rather independent economically not many are found to own cattle. Out of twelve Kol families studied in Barela only four owned cattle: five bullocks, two cows and two calves. Most of the families had a few chickens. Dogs and cats are found in Kol villages but they do not seem to be owned by individuals, belonging rather to the whole village. No swine were kept in Barela, nor by any other Kol community which we studied. Some intimated that in the years that were past swine were kept but that they gave it up so as not to offend their Hindu neighbours. Kols never keep donkeys nor horses. One Kol in Barela wanted to purchase a pair of bullocks, and to do this went to a bazaar in Panagar a distance of twenty miles away, where he got one for eight rupees. A few days later he purchased another from a nearby Gond village and paid twelve rupees. Neither was a very good specimen.

The survey of Kharara Ghat indicated that there they owned 35 bullocks, 73 cows, 43 goats and about 200 chickens. In our investigations we found only one or two Kol families owning buffaloes; their cost and care is far too much for the average Kol. Eight out of the thirty

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

members of the family able to work they leave their rude huts and then return three or four months later with a bit of money with which to buy clothes and the like. Some of the women accompany them, though not the children, and when they return at the end of the season there are a large number of infants which have been born to them in the fields as they have worked. 178 221 464

There are three strata among the Kols of today. From the economic view the factory coolies are better off. While wages are not high they are higher than can be won in agricultural or forest work and the income is steady. As forest people and agricultural serfs they may have enough to eat, but no money for anything else. Factory work brings three to four times the wage of the Kol who works away in the villages, and lasts the year round. Everywhere it is said that the Kols are the best group of workmen among those employed and often they are the main workers throughout a factory where unskilled labour is needed. As they are working in the factories they are also learning trades, and fifty years from now it may be found that Kols have taken up many trades and have made good. There is no occupational restriction as with many Hindu castes. 178 434 464 [463]

As the economic level is raised there is usually found a definite improvement in living conditions. Bad as the factory lines are they are much better than the rude huts of the jungle Kols. A Kol in Katni has built for himself a brick house of a very respectable appearance. In order to supplement their farm earnings the agricultural Kols still practise on the side their primitive occupations of wood and grass cutting. The industrial Kols are not able to do this, for they must work daily in the factory unless it happens to be closed on Sunday. On that day it will be found that a few Kols have gone out where wood may be cut and each brings back a load to the factory lines. This is cut for their own use and is not for sale. 178 511 [313]

Wherever Kols have been settled for some years they have told us how they first came and lived in grass huts and how gradually, as they became sure of their place there and as work became fairly regular and certain, that they have put up better living quarters and finally have built good mud houses with tiled roofs. More is owned by them than they ever had before. They possess livestock and there may be considerable amounts invested in jewellery. [231 454]

Judging from the pictures in books like Crooke, Russell and Hiralal and Roy's work on the Mundas and other related tribes, the Kols of today in Central India cover their persons with clothes much more completely than the earlier pictures represent. Today one finds but little exposure of the breasts by Kol women, and in the 178 291